United Nations S/PV.5530

# Security Council

Sixty-first year

*Provisional*

## 5530th meeting

Thursday, 21 September 2006, 3.30 p.m.
New York

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| *President:* | Ms. Bakoyannis | (Greece) |
| *Members:* | Argentina | Mr. Taiana |
| | China | Mr. Li Zhaoxing |
| | Congo | Mr. Adada |
| | Denmark | Mr. Moeller |
| | France | Mr. Douste-Blazy |
| | Ghana | Nana Akufo-Addo |
| | Japan | Mr. Arima |
| | Peru | Mr. García Belaunde |
| | Qatar | Sheikh Al-Thani |
| | Russian Federation | Mr. Lavrov |
| | Slovakia | Mr. Kubiš |
| | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Mrs. Beckett |
| | United Republic of Tanzania | Mrs. Migiro |
| | United States of America | Ms. Rice |

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 30 August 2006 from the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/700)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

06-52982 (E)

*The meeting was called to order at 3.50 p.m.*

**Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

**The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

**Letter dated 30 August 2006 from the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/700)**

**The President**: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Bahrain, Finland and Israel in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In accordance with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 21 September 2006 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2006/752 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council being held on Thursday, 21 September 2006, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Executive Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, to participate in the meeting in accordance with the Council's provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. Members of the Council have before them document S/2006/700, which contains a letter dated 30 August 2006 from the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I invite the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, to take the floor.

**The Secretary-General**: Like no other conflict, the Arab-Israeli conflict carries a powerful symbolic and emotional charge for people throughout the world. The narratives of the two sides — dispossession, prolonged occupation and denial of statehood on one side, terrorism and existential threats on the other — stir the fears and passions of people of many nations. And our continued failure to resolve this conflict calls into question the legitimacy and the effectiveness of the Security Council itself.

The events of this summer have reminded us all how dangerous it is to leave the broader Arab-Israeli conflict unresolved and how interconnected the region's problems are. At the same time, the role of the Security Council in bringing about the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hizbollah and charting the way towards a sustainable ceasefire through resolution 1701 (2006) showed that it can play a vital role in the search for peace in the region. Resolution 1701 (2006) rightly stressed the need to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all the Council's earlier relevant resolutions. To do this, we must make progress on the issue at the heart of the conflict, which is the problem of Israel and Palestine.

Large majorities of both Israelis and Palestinians desire peace. What they desperately need is a bridge to enable them to reach peace from their present sad state of conflict. The bridge to peace must be wide enough to accommodate all who have a legitimate stake in the process, long enough to span the enormous gulf of mistrust that separates the parties and strong enough to withstand the efforts that will inevitably be made to sabotage it.

Yesterday, I stressed to my Quartet partners that the existing bridge to peace is badly in need of repair. Its foundations seem weak, since both parties have failed to take the concrete actions needed to meet their existing obligations. And the destination on the far side — an end to the occupation that began in 1967 and a secure Israel at peace with all its neighbours,

including a new Palestinian State — remains distant, ill-defined and, for many, almost unimaginable.

Today we are dealing with a difficult situation in Gaza, where we see closures and a Palestinian Authority that is starved of resources. Palestinian schools, ministries and other institutions are now in sharp decline. Palestinian society is rapidly becoming poorer. If this were to continue and the Palestinian Authority were to collapse, the consequent fragmentation and radicalization of Palestinian society would be a terrible, perhaps irreversible, strategic setback.

Today, Palestinians in Gaza and in the West Bank living under occupation have neither a State nor a functioning government. Is it any wonder that they look to the international community for protection, for help and for hope? And if this is not forthcoming, the young people of Palestine will, sadly, be attracted by the false promises of those who advocate violence.

For their part, Israelis rightly demand an end to rocket attacks against the towns and kibbutzim of southern Israel, the return of the soldier captured on 25 June and a Palestinian Authority that accepts basic principles of peace and takes credible action to prevent attacks against Israel. Yet in the absence of a political process, which is the only way of bringing about lasting peace, Israelis naturally look to their own military to deal with security threats.

It would be easy for the international community to declare that the parties are not ready for dialogue and that until they are there is little that can be done. But that would be deeply disappointing. It would also be unfair to the parties themselves.

Poll after poll shows that people on both sides understand that there is no military solution to the conflict. These same polls show that people understand that a two-State solution cannot be achieved through unilateral actions by either side. I am convinced that both the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Olmert, and the Palestinian President, Mr. Abbas, understand these realities and are searching for a way forward. I send both of them my strong support, as the Quartet did yesterday.

The Quartet also encouraged efforts to form a Palestinian national unity government, in the hope that the programme of such a government will reflect Quartet principles and facilitate early engagement by the international community. President Abbas's wisdom in pursuing this path must be recognized. So must the efforts of Palestinian Prime Minister Haniyeh.

During the meeting, I also reminded my Quartet partners that the Quartet itself must be more active and effective if confidence in the peace process is to be restored. I am glad to say the Quartet agreed that greater engagement is crucial — on the ground, with the parties and in the region.

But the test will be action. The parties must now rise to their responsibilities; so must the Quartet and our partners in the region; and so must the Security Council. With all the tools at our disposal, let us work together to put in place a credible political process based on dialogue, parallel implementation of obligations, monitoring of performance and clarity as to the end goal. The time has come to rebuild the shattered bridge to peace.

**The President**: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I now invite His Excellency Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bahrain, to take the floor.

**Shaikh Al-Khalifa** (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): May I, at the outset, Madam, warmly congratulate you and your friendly country, Greece, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I thank you for your efforts that culminated in holding this meeting. I would also like to commend your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Ghana, for his efficiency, dedicated efforts and successful work during his tenure as President.

This historic meeting of the Security Council constitutes an important precedent in the annals of the Arab-Israeli conflict, a conflict that must be terminated. The Council is meeting today at a high level and upon a collective Arab initiative to consider the situation in the Middle East at a time when the peace process threatens to come to a halt.

I have the honour to address the Council, on behalf of all members of the League of Arab States, concerning a very serious and dangerous situation which affects not only the Middle East region but the entire world: the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Ministerial Council of the League of Arab States sought to come to the Security Council to discuss the peace process and present its case in order to shoulder its responsibilities

and play its role in contributing to the attainment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East region and the world as a whole.

This new position by the Ministerial Council of the League of Arab States was initiated for the sake of future generations in the region. Our aim is to have a stable and secure Middle East in which hostility is replaced with friendship and prosperity for its people. Such friendship and prosperity will not be exclusive to the region, but would also benefit the entire world.

In the past, we have witnessed the horrors and repercussions of war. However, our peoples are determined today not to see the continuation of such horrors. They are determined to build peace and confidence among all the peoples of the Middle East. In his statement to the General Assembly on Tuesday, 19 September, the Secretary-General referred to the situation in the Middle East in the following terms, which he echoed again today.

(*spoke in English*)

> "This climate of fear and suspicion is constantly refuelled by the violence in the Middle East. We might like to think of the Arab-Israeli conflict as just one regional conflict amongst many. But it is not. No other conflict carries such a powerful symbolic and emotional charge among people far removed from the battlefield."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

The persistence of the Arab-Israeli conflict has had dire consequences and is exhausting the resources of the region. It is creating instability. It is also allowing extremist forces to flourish. The Arab States are therefore deeply concerned over the continuation of this conflict which creates serious consequences for regional peace and security. Therefore, the Arab world firmly believes in the urgent need to bring the conflict to a peaceful resolution.

It is important to create an environment conducive to peace in the region. That would require open-mindedness on all sides so as to encourage negotiation and discussions among them. Our objective is peace and stability for the region, not conflict and turmoil. We ought to work for reconciliation and conciliation. We should act to heal the wounds which have accumulated for over 50 years.

At the most recent ministerial-level session of the League of Arab States, the 126th session, we reached an agreement to undertake this démarche before this body at the ministerial level in order to end the current stalemate in the peace process due to the lack of progress, with its adverse consequences for regional stability and security.

Our objective in calling for this meeting is not to apportion blame or to exchange accusations. It is rather to address the situation in the Middle East in a constructive spirit and in a forward-looking manner, with the aim of reviving the peace process through direct negotiations between the parties to the conflict. The Ministerial Council of the League of Arab States is convinced that now is the appropriate time to relaunch the peace process. It is an important opportunity to end the current stalemate.

In our view, reviving the peace process could mean reinvigorating the road map, which contains the elements of a lasting peace, and restoring it to its right track, implementing relevant Security Council resolutions, namely, resolution 242 (1967) up to resolution 1515 (2003) and the principle of land for peace, as well as implementing the Arab initiative, while, at the same time, devising a new and carefully developed mechanism to implement the road map and put the peace process back on track.

Allow me to emphasize that the main elements of the Arab initiative are as follows: the Arab States are prepared to consider that it is possible to bring an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict; they are prepared to enter into a peace agreement between themselves and Israel; they are prepared to establish normal and full relations with Israel in the context of a comprehensive peace which requires: full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories; arriving at a just and agreed solution to the Palestinian refugee problem in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III); and acceptance of the establishment of an independent sovereign Palestinian State with holy Jerusalem as its capital.

Meanwhile, the Ministerial Council of the League of Arab States proposes that the Security Council agree on the following elements in order to revive the peace process: initiate negotiations between the parties, based on the agreed terms of reference, with a set time frame, assisted by the international community and under the auspices of the Security Council; request the Secretary-

General, in close consultation with all parties concerned, including the parties to the conflict, the States of the region and the Quartet, to prepare a report on appropriate mechanisms for resuming direct negotiations between the parties, including, inter alia, options for format, guarantees, time limits, parameters and the role of the Security Council and other third parties, and to submit this report to the Security Council, request that the Security Council remain actively seized of the matter and reconvene upon submission of the aforementioned report at the ministerial level in order to consider further measures.

The determination of all the parties to end the conflict, with the necessary assistance from the Security Council, would help in building genuine and just peace in the region. We have a good chance now to obtain peace and should not allow it to slip away. If we lose this chance, we will all be losers. We sincerely hope that the Council, within its mandate to maintain international peace and security, will pave the way for peace negotiations. We welcome the assistance of third parties in this endeavour. We wish those efforts every success in bringing peace, which is the precondition for stability, prosperity and development in the Middle East, and the world.

**The President**: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Dan Gillerman, Permanent Representative of Israel.

**Mr. Gillerman** (Israel): I wish to thank you personally, Madam President, for the goodwill, initiative, energy, creativity and consideration you have shown over the last few weeks and especially over the last few days towards the convening of this meeting. Israel knows that this meeting is convened by people who want peace and who genuinely desire to see peace in our region.

However, as some members know, including you, Madam President, Israel was unsure, practically until the last minute, whether to attend this meeting. Our experience has shown that this forum is not always helpful in advancing peace, but rather, that it may generate acrimony. I have been instructed nevertheless by my Minister to update you on developments from our perspective.

As you know, just a few days ago, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni met with Chairman Abbas in what was a very good meeting in which we agreed to re-energize the dialogue between us and create a permanent channel to pursue ways to advance the process together. We agreed also that progress must be based on the road map and the principles for peace that have been agreed between the parties. We believe that we reached this understanding because, knowing the many difficulties we currently face, both sides recognize that we do not need another forum for acting out our differences and that the only forum for resolving them is the bilateral negotiating table.

We all know that there is a common vision for peace that binds together Israelis, moderate Palestinians, the moderates in our region and the international community. It is embodied in the road map endorsed by the international community, and it was reaffirmed only yesterday by the Quartet, of which the United Nations itself is part. At its heart is the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Yesterday Foreign Minister Livni spoke before the General Assembly and reaffirmed Israel's belief in that vision and the principles of peace that stem from it. Israel is committed to being a partner for peace. Believe me, nobody wants peace more than we do. The people of Israel have shown that time and again. We know that the dangers to peace will not be overcome by military means alone. Stagnation is not in our interest, and it is not our policy. We want to realize the two-State vision as envisaged in the road map. It is for that reason that we embarked on the painful process of disengagement last year, in order to create opportunity for progress. But sadly — tragically — what we received in return was terror.

It is for that reason that we are committed to the process of dialogue with all Palestinians who believe in mutual compromise and historic reconciliation. If we have not yet turned that vision of peace into reality it is not for lack of meetings in the Council. It is not for lack of agreements or resolutions or international conferences. I want to believe that all those gathered at this table know the true obstacles to progress. I believe they know, as we do, that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the consequence, and not the cause, of the ideology of intolerance and hatred that plagues our region and has taken control of the Palestinian Authority in the form of Hamas.

That is not a reality that can just be ignored. It cannot be swept away by vague formulations and half measures. The road map and the three international

conditions are designed precisely to confront the enemies of peace and ensure that the future Palestinian State envisaged by the two-State solution is not a terror State that perpetuates the conflict, but a peaceful State that ends it. Discarding the building blocks of peace will not speed up the process, it will simply ensure that the edifice of peace will crumble and fall. Our goal must be to rekindle the road map process without reigniting the conflict. That requires that we act with urgency, but not with recklessness. It requires that we not confuse paper with progress or form with substance. And, most of all, it requires genuine consultation, negotiation and agreement between the parties themselves. There is no other way. Any progress begins with a genuine dialogue among those committed to peace. It begins with the release of Israeli hostages and an end to all terrorist attacks. It begins with a renewal of our commitment to the two-State solution and an acceptance of the basic principle that each people's rights are to be realized in their own homeland, not in the homeland of others.

There is much those in the region can do to support that process, but it is not about more initiatives or United Nations meetings. It is, first and foremost, about commitment to prepare the people of the region for the price of peace, to accept the true meaning of the two-State solution and to teach all the children of the Middle East the values of tolerance and the blessings of coexistence.

Sometimes tragedy is not just the pain we suffer but also the opportunity we miss. The contours of the agreement we have to reach are clear, and have been for decades. The tragedy is that the lack of genuine commitment to true coexistence means that the people of the region are still waiting, when we could have enjoyed the benefits of peace long ago. But it is not too late, if we have the courage to see that there is more that binds us together than tears us apart. It is not too late to turn hope into reality. It is not too late to march on that road to peace, but only if we have the strength to defend its agreed principles and the courage to confront its enemies.

**The President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassem Bin Jabr Al-Thani, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar.

**Sheikh Al-Thani** (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would like to thank Greece for the important role it has played.

I was happy to hear my friend the representative of Israel say that they have agreed with the Palestinians on holding direct talks. It is our hope that those talks will lead to prompt results. I believe that words are important but that deeds are more important.

At the outset, I would like to express my sincere thanks to all the members of the Council for granting the Arab request to hold this meeting to discuss the question of peace in the Middle East in its various dimensions. That question is not new to the Council, the United Nations or to those working in international relations at the bilateral, regional and international levels.

That being the case, it is only logical to ask a simple and central question: why has this matter remained for almost 60 years without a solution that is satisfactory to the parties concerned? Does the reason lie in the lack of international resolutions that are an embodiment of international law and that can ensure that solution? Can the solution be achieved through the implementation of such resolutions? Is the persistence of the question dictated by the interests of one party or another so that the continuing conflict can be used in the service of ulterior motives? Are we and the international community unable to provide a solution?

Providing exact answers to those questions and others in a meeting such as this is no doubt important. However, what is more important is that we recognize some basic tenets that are binding on us all without exception, because we find their essential justification in our commitments under the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, which we committed ourselves to comply with in our international relations.

Since its inception, the Organization was intended to achieve international peace and security and to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all peoples. Yet those objectives have still not been achieved as regards the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine. With the passage of time, that has led to catastrophic repercussions for all aspects of the situation in the region. Occupation has been extended to the territories of others, together with its attendant human suffering for millions, which is rejected by both

legal and moral precepts. Arsenals grew, the problems of human development worsened and enormous financial resources were squandered on military expenditures instead of being devoted to improving the lives of peoples and giving them hope for a dignified life.

Even more serious than all of that is the fact that this situation has been conducive to the growth of extremism, rancour and hatred, which has led to violence and terrorism as a means of achieving rights, without regard for the lives of Palestinians, Arabs, Israelis and others whose countries and societies have been plagued by terrorism perpetrated under various pretexts. How could it be otherwise, when this prolonged conflict has yet to be resolved, when credibility has been lost and commitments have been shirked?

It is not my intention to criticize, accuse or cast aspersions. Rather, my concern is to underscore the bare facts candidly and transparently. On the one hand, it is not Israel alone that is entitled to the legitimate right to live in peace and security in the region. The Palestinian and Arab sides are also entitled to that. On the other hand, the Palestinian and Arab sides have affirmed for quite some time, through their positions and conduct, that they desire and are vigorously seeking the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace so that everyone can live in dignity.

The problem at hand does not need a magic solution and neither side can, in my opinion, come up with an innovative solution because the solution is known to all and sundry. It is the principle of land for peace, which is based on the existence of two States, Palestine and Israel, which President George Bush referred to in his address to the General Assembly two days ago and which is clearly established in the resolutions and legitimate terms of reference, which are binding on Israel, the Palestinians and the Arab side in general. Those were endorsed by the Security Council and provided the basis for the approach adopted by the international parties, especially the Quartet, with the support of the international community.

Hence, just and fair solutions are not impossible provided that there are good intentions and political will based on sincere and earnest compliance by all with the norms of international law. We also feel that it is not possible to address the other political, security and development problems in the region without first achieving an honourable and satisfactory solution to this question.

The peace that we seek must be sustainable and there must therefore be an integrated approach that embraces political reform, democratization and human development. In that regard, the responsibility for establishing a just and comprehensive peace falls not exclusively on the parties directly concerned, but also on the international community, especially those States that are influential in international relations, foremost among which are the five permanent members of the Security Council. The responsibility is a shared one because the interest in establishing peace is shared and because we are all bound by the provisions of the Charter.

In view of all that, we welcome the meeting of the Quartet held yesterday and look forward to its presenting specific ideas to develop effective and purposeful mechanisms for a prompt resumption of the direct negotiations among the parties and on all tracks in order to achieve, within a specific time frame, a comprehensive, just and permanent settlement on the basis of international resolutions and legitimate terms of reference, most prominent among which is the road map. To that end, the momentum necessary for the continuation of the peace process must be maintained regardless of the prevailing political climate. We also call upon the international community to support this endeavour, to seek to overcome the obstacles that impede the peace process, and to provide the required guarantees, in addition to the necessary incentives, to implement the agreements achieved.

I should like to note here the efforts of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to form a Government of national unity. We call on all to support those endeavours.

From our perspective, dialogue is an essential part of the peace process. We therefore participated in the alliance of civilizations initiative and sponsored meetings on dialogue among religions, including the Jewish religion. We knew that we could be criticized by some, but that did not stop us from acting because we understand the importance of dialogue.

I should like to refer to an extremely important point. Our serious resolve to make effective efforts for the sake of peace must not be thwarted by any action aimed at subverting our common effort. We are a

nation that seeks a just peace and not a violent one. All fair-minded people can grasp that from our civilization and our cultural and religious heritage. At the same time, we are aware that a large majority in Israel shares our desire for peace, irrespective of provocations and sacrifices. I recall what Yitzhak Rabin said in the Knesset in 1993: "We are destined to live together on the same soil in the same land". I know that quoting the words of Rabin will cause me to be criticized in my country, but they are words of truth.

We have to realize that we cannot choose our neighbours or our enemies. The question now is: Are we ready to face the challenge of this issue with a sense of responsibility in order to secure peace, security, stability, justice and equity for the States and the peoples of the Middle East, including Israel? Success in achieving the desired peace is success for everyone, and failure to do so honours no one. We should no longer squander this opportunity as we have in the past.

**The President**: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Per Stig Moeller, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

**Mr. Moeller** (Denmark): Denmark welcomes this opportunity to discuss how to address the urgent and serious situation in the Middle East. The momentum created by our common efforts to end the hostilities in Lebanon and to put in place a process leading to lasting peace must be used to revive the Middle East peace process. Against that backdrop, we welcome yesterday's Quartet meeting and fully associate ourselves with its statement.

There is an urgent need to give the people of the region a reason to hope. Their growing sense of desperation must be overcome. That can happen only if they are given a credible prospect of a better future.

My recent meetings with Israeli and Palestinian leaders have been encouraging. My clear impression is that both sides recognize the urgent need to revive the peace process and are ready to do so. The international community must do everything possible to assist them in that endeavour and to provide the incentives needed to foster the lasting peace we all want.

We already have the framework in place. Over long years, we have developed a basis for achieving lasting peace. It includes the Arab peace initiative, the performance-based road map for a permanent two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as relevant Security Council resolutions, all based on the principle of land for peace. That framework, agreed upon through arduous negotiations, offers the best foundation for achieving our goal. It must continue to be our guidepost as we try to revive the peace process.

The underlying premise of the road map is that the two sides will take a series of simultaneous and parallel steps leading to peace. Even if the time frame, of course, needs to be revisited, the principles and the sequencing it lays down remain as relevant as ever.

The ongoing efforts by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to form a Government of national unity are welcome and I hope they will be successful. It is also my hope that the new Government's political platform will reflect the Quartet principles and allow for early engagement. President Abbas' efforts in that regard can be successful only with strong and committed support from the international community. Therefore, Denmark is committed to providing financial assistance to President Abbas. I am also encouraged by the prospects of a meeting between President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert in the near future with a view to restarting the peace process. To be successful, those negotiations must be accompanied by an end to violence.

Moreover, the captured Israeli soldiers must be released, and the Palestinian ministers and legislators in Israeli custody must be immediately freed.

Urgent attention must be paid to humanitarian conditions in the Palestinian territories. We welcome the generous contributions made this month at the Stockholm international donor conference and the decision to extend and expand the temporary international mechanism. At the same time, Israel should release the Palestinian tax and customs revenues it is withholding and keep open all border crossings. And all Palestinian factions must immediately stop their attacks, just as all Israeli military activities in the Palestinian territories must cease.

In conclusion, I encourage the parties to do everything within their power to seize this moment now that the world is again focused on Middle East peace. The international community must and, I sincerely hope, will provide full support to their efforts. I pledge that Denmark will not waver from its commitment to continuing to do everything possible to

achieve the ultimate goal — a lasting peace in the Middle East in which all States are living side by side in peace and security and where all peoples can prosper and freely develop their societies.

**The President**: I shall now give the floor to His Excellency Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ghana.

**Nana Akufo-Addo** (Ghana): Ghana commends the delegation of Greece, the League of Arab States and you personally, Madam President, for organizing this important meeting giving us yet another opportunity to critically examine the options for advancing the quest for a comprehensive, just and durable peace in the Middle East. The tragic consequences of the failure of previous peace initiatives were enacted recently in Lebanon. Now that the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) is under way and the people of Lebanon have begun to rebuild their country after the devastating 34-day war, we must seize the new momentum for peace and work towards achieving a meaningful change in the dangerous status quo in the Middle East.

Ghana has always supported a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict that will meet the aspirations of both peoples, alleviating the fear and desperation that breed extremism. A sovereign and independent democratic State of Palestine, with structured and well-functioning institutions, will be better placed to cooperate with Israel and guarantee the State's long-term security.

In our assessment, the current stalemate in the implementation of the road map serves no one's interests. That is why we take a positive view of the moves made by the Palestinians in their efforts to form a Government of national unity. Such a Government could help transform Hamas and bring it into the political mainstream. We also welcome the outcome of yesterday's meeting of the Quartet principals in New York, especially the measures aimed at alleviating the humanitarian conditions in the West Bank and Gaza. These positive developments could be enhanced further through the freeing of hostages and prisoners.

No one disputes that the Palestinian question is at the core of the Middle East problem. But, in real terms, how does that question translate into the rights and obligations of all interested parties to the Middle East conflict today? The international community must be clear and consistent on these issues and be prepared to hold both parties to their obligations.

All who genuinely believe in the vision of an independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, must commit equally to the elimination of all direct and indirect threats to the existence and security of Israel. There can be no other path to lasting peace in the Middle East, and we urge the parties to the conflict to muster the courage to compromise and negotiate in good faith for the sake of all the peoples in the region. This is the position of the President of the Republic of Ghana, His Excellency Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor and his Government. It is the duty of the Security Council, together with the Quartet, to provide the necessary leadership.

**The President**: I shall now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jose Antonio Garcia Belaunde, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Peru.

**Mr. Garcia Belaunde** (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): During the past few months, the situation in the Middle East has suffered one of its gravest crises, causing enormous destruction and death. Peru deeply deplores these facts and considers it necessary to intensify the efforts to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We believe that the purpose of this meeting of the Security Council, and also the goal of the concerned regional organizations, should be to help the parties to achieve a peaceful solution.

Although the events of the recent past have been serious, especially for the Lebanese population, there have been some positive reactions that opened new chances for peace. One of them was the approval of resolution 1701 (2006), adopted unanimously by the Security Council, putting an end to the war in Lebanon and northern Israel. We are pleased that that resolution was accepted by the Governments of Israel and Lebanon, and that its implementation, during the last 40 days, has been effective.

We believe that there is much more to do. Nevertheless there are some points that must be highlighted: the steady deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon is going in the right direction, allowing the withdrawal of the occupying Israeli forces from southern Lebanon and the deployment of the Lebanese army, securing these areas for the first time in many decades. The lifting of the air and sea blockade is also a positive development. The

parties involved must continue to respect the cessation of hostilities and to fully observe the Blue Line. It is also essential to intensify the clearance of mines and unexploded ordnance, for which the Government of Israel must provide more detailed information.

The disarming of Hizbollah and the militias operating in Lebanon remains a key element for moving the peace process forward. The presence of armed groups which challenge the State's monopoly on the legitimate use of force throughout Lebanese territory is not acceptable. This requirement, which has been invoked repeatedly since the adoption of the Taif Accords in 1989 and which was reaffirmed in the Lebanese Government's decision of 27 July 2006, must be implemented. To this end, it is also important that the neighbouring countries in the region should collaborate by avoiding the sale or supply of arms and related materiel.

The demarcation of Lebanon's international borders is also urgent, especially in those areas where the border is disputed, including the Sheba'a farms area. We know that the Secretary-General and his envoys are working with the parties on the elements and principles underlying a long-term solution. We look forward to receiving their proposals.

I would like to underscore the efforts being made by the humanitarian agencies and organizations in Lebanon, which continue to do everything in their power to bring aid to those who need it as promptly as possible. I would also like to remind the Council that the crisis situation will continue until the economic and productive activities disrupted in Lebanon are resumed. That is key in a successful rebuilding effort.

Another central problem in the region is the situation of Palestine and the territories occupied by Israel. Peru once again deplores the acts of violence, kidnappings and loss of human lives, together with the critical situation endured by the Palestinian population in the occupied territories. On this issue we agree with the call to strengthen the temporary international mechanism to improve the economic and humanitarian conditions in Gaza and the West Bank. We urge Israel to use the mechanism to transfer the tax and customs revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority.

Furthermore, we reiterate that a negotiated solution for the peaceful coexistence of two States with secure and internationally recognized borders will remain elusive if one of the parties fails to recognize the other's right to exist. Fulfilling the requirements laid down by the Quartet since the beginning of this year — renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations — should be understood as marking an end to the phase of violence and confrontation and the beginning of a phase of negotiation and construction, in which the Security Council will be able to play a more effective role.

To this end, and sharing the views expressed by the Quartet yesterday in its statement, we hope that the new Palestinian government of national unity, under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, will reflect and implement these requirements in order to begin a new era.

Finally, Peru believes that the principles contained in the road map remain valid and we reaffirm our commitment to this Council in order to make progress towards a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, based on resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1515 (2003).

**The President**: I shall now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Li Zhaoxing, Minister for Foreign Affairs of China.

**Mr. Li Zhaoxing** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to offer my congratulations on the convening of this meeting, which is the result of the concerted efforts of all parties concerned. China has all along fully supported this initiative by the League of Arab States.

The Middle East used to be a land of peace and tranquility — a land of milk and honey. Yet during the past half century, it has been awash in blood and tears, ravaged by war and hostilities. This is a challenge to human conscience.

China welcomes the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006). The resolution represents an important step towards settling the Lebanese-Israeli conflict and must be fully implemented. China calls for an early expansion and deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and is ready to contribute additional troops to it. We have already begun to honour our commitment to providing humanitarian assistance to Lebanon and will continue to do so. We urge all parties to extend a helping hand to the Lebanese people. More importantly, the

international community should urge Israel and Lebanon to reach a long-term political solution, beat their swords into ploughshares, and live in peace.

The Middle East peace process is stalled, but peace is not out of reach. The process must be revived, and to that end I wish to make the following proposals.

First, we must respect history and face reality. History teaches us lessons, while reality gives us the key to creating the future. To settle the question of the Middle East, full consideration should be given to its historical backdrop, which involves religious conflicts, colonialism, ethnic clashes and border disputes. At the same time, we must face reality. Israel should respect the choice of the Palestinian people and agree to the establishment of an independent State of Palestine. All forces in Palestine should recognize Israel's right to existence and its sovereignty. We hope that the Israeli and Palestinian Governments will act in the fundamental interest of their peoples, respond to the call of the times and make the right choices, so that the two countries can live in peace and develop in harmony.

Secondly, mutual trust must be fostered and peace talks must continue. No one in the Middle East will emerge victorious from war, and the use of force will not lead to peace. Negotiation is the only way to peace. Israel and its Arab neighbours must put an end to violence and conflicts, in particular military actions targeted at civilians, and take steps to rebuild mutual trust. On that basis, they should speedily restart negotiations and make the necessary compromises and concessions to achieve a peace of the brave.

Thirdly, the root causes of conflicts must be addressed and efforts made to find a comprehensive solution. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict remains the core and root cause of the Middle East issue. That conflict is closely connected with the Lebanese-Israeli issue, the Syrian-Israeli issue and other regional issues, which have increasingly affected each other. To achieve a just and sustainable peace in the Middle East, it is critical that Security Council resolutions and the principle of land for peace be adhered to. All related issues should be addressed in a coordinated way so as to avoid complicating the already volatile situation in the region.

Fourthly, cooperation must be promoted for the benefit of the people. China calls on Israel to lift its blockade against Palestine, dismantle the separation wall and facilitate the supply of humanitarian assistance to Palestine. Palestine and Israel should expand non-governmental business and trade ties, to enable the two peoples to be the first to enjoy the dividends of peace and to put an end to their longstanding mutual animosity. This, in turn, will create an atmosphere conducive to pursuing a political solution.

Fifthly, it is key to act in an impartial way and step up mediation. The help and support of the international community is essential to progress in the Middle East peace process. It is important that all parties act in an impartial and balanced way and refrain from using double standards.

China supports the efforts of the Quartet. We reiterate our belief that the Security Council should shoulder its primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security, and we welcome any new initiative that will help move forward the Middle East peace process.

There are bound to be obstacles on the road to peace in the Middle East. However, as long as we engage in peace talks rather than resort to force, seek cooperation and avoid confrontation, enhance mutual understanding and reduce mutual hostility, we will definitely be able to open the door to peace.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Mr. Philippe Douste-Blazy, Minister for Foreign Affairs of France.

**Mr. Douste-Blazy** (France) (*spoke in French*): A little over a month after the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), which led to the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon and established the parameters for a lasting political solution between the two countries, one fact is clear: stability in the Middle East will require the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, the Palestinian question fuels most of the hotspots in the region. It breeds frustration in public opinion, deepens misunderstandings between different societies, and plays into the hands of extremists.

As the status quo is not a viable one, reviving the momentum for peace between Israelis and Palestinians must therefore become a priority for us once again. A number of factors are coming into play at this time that encourage us to move forward.

The conflict in Lebanon has confirmed the fact that there is no military solution to the crises in the Middle East. The Israeli-Palestinian question is no exception: a lasting solution will be found only through a negotiated process. The parties themselves say that they wish to resume the dialogue. We encourage the Israeli Prime Minister and the President of the Palestinian Authority to take that path.

The regional environment is itself more favourable, with, inter alia, the revival by the Arab League of its Beirut initiative, which sets out the bases for a sustainable peace in the Middle East. We support that initiative.

In Israel and in the Palestinian territories, more than a decade after the Oslo accords, despite the deaths, the destruction and the humiliation endured, the desire for peace is strong among the large majority of each of the two peoples.

However, confidence must be restored on each side. Efforts to restore it must be made immediately through concrete measures on both sides. The release of Corporal Shalit, the soldier kidnapped early last summer, would be one such measure — an indispensable one — together with an end to the firing of rockets, the freezing of all settlement activities, the release of the Palestinian leaders arrested in recent months, and the lifting of the drastic restrictions imposed by Israel on the movement of goods and people within the Palestinian territories and between these territories and the world.

The formation, as announced, of a Palestinian national unity Government that would take on board the demands of the international community would be a major development. If confirmed, such a development would have to lead to a re-evaluation by the international community of its policy on assistance and contacts with the Palestinian Government. It should be turned to advantage so as to give fresh impetus to the peace process. It is because we remain committed to the principles set out by the Quartet that we must encourage current developments, which bring us closer to them. The international community must stand side by side with the President of the Palestinian Authority. He can count on France's support.

This context offers an opportunity to break the stalemate, and the parties must seize it. The international community must help them do so by resolutely committing to help re-establish dialogue and re-launch a genuine drive for peace. An initial step was taken yesterday with the Quartet meeting, which emphasized the urgent need to move towards a just and lasting settlement and identified certain measures that would help restore confidence. Other steps must now follow, such as the preparation of the international conference proposed by President Chirac, the objective of which would be to define the guarantees, especially the security guarantees, expected by parties in the framework of a peace agreement. That international conference could take place in the context of the Arab League initiative and pave the way for a new regional framework for collective security and economic integration.

At this turning point, we are convinced that the danger lies in inaction, and that action would be rich in opportunities. The international community must help the parties transform their new willingness to resume dialogue into a genuine dynamic for peace. The goal of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security is not beyond reach if we are able to demonstrate boldness and, above all, political courage in the weeks and months ahead.

**The President**: I shall now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Margaret Beckett, MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

**Mrs. Beckett** (United Kingdom): I share in welcoming you to the chair, Madam President.

Events over the summer have shown once again the terrible human cost resulting from the lack of progress towards peace in the Middle East. We have seen it in Gaza, with over 200 fatalities and an appalling humanitarian situation, and in Israel, where rockets continue to fall on civilians. In particular, we have seen its impact in Lebanon, where this summer's crisis had its origins in the continuing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. The central importance of peace in the Middle East has never been clearer.

As the British Government has repeatedly emphasized, there can be no higher priority for the international community. I welcome this opportunity for the Security Council to address the issue, and am grateful to the Arab League for the initiative.

The international community is united in the goal of a two-State solution. Only a handful of extremists, who benefit from ongoing conflict, oppose that vision.

I agree with my colleague from Qatar, that we should reinvigorate the road map, which is the framework for getting there. Both sides need to meet their obligations under it. In the Quartet we have a mechanism for coordinating the international community's engagement. I welcome the Quartet's statement from its meeting yesterday, which gives us a clear framework for moving forward.

So we are not short of vision or mechanisms or frameworks. What we need are some practical ideas and, above all, the political will to deliver them. I see four immediate priorities.

First, contact between the parties must be resumed. We welcome the commitments made by both Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas during Tony Blair's recent visit, to the effect that they were prepared to meet without conditions. I particularly welcome the role of Egypt and other Arab States in working for the release of Corporal Shalit, to help create the conditions for a productive dialogue.

Secondly, we need a Palestinian Government with which the international community can engage. That means one that is based — as my Danish colleague said — on the Quartet's three principles. President Abbas is a man of peace and integrity. We support his efforts to form a national unity Government that will work for peace with Israel.

Thirdly, we must address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Pending the outcome of negotiations on a unity Government, the United Kingdom supports an extension of the temporary international mechanism to help alleviate the situation. We are working with European Union and Quartet partners to deliver that.

Then fourthly, we must help develop the institutions of a future Palestinian State as a means to build and sustain peace. That is in no way a new idea, but it remains an important and, increasingly, an urgent one.

Tony Blair said in Ramallah earlier this month that we needed real international support for the process of peacebuilding. We look forward to working with colleagues in the European Union, the Quartet and the Arab world in the coming weeks to develop a new programme aimed at building viable Palestinian institutions that can help deliver peace with Israel and prosperity and security for Palestinians. That is a practical agenda to take us forward. What I believe we may be hearing, and what I would like to see from this meeting today, is a clear commitment of the political will necessary to implement it.

**The President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ján Kubiš, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovakia.

**Mr. Kubiš** (Slovakia): I would like to join the previous speakers in thanking you, Madam President, for convening the meeting. Today's meeting is perhaps symbolically taking place on the International Day of Peace. As the recent events in Lebanon have proved to all of us, once again, there is indeed no solution based on the use of force, and there is no military solution to the many challenges and problems of the Middle East region, with the Israeli-Palestinian dispute at its core.

The only way to achieve a comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict in general, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular, is through peaceful negotiations and full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions and the principles defined by the Quartet. In that regard, we welcome yesterday's statement by the Quartet in which it reaffirms its commitment to the road map.

The recent tragic conflict in Lebanon could have been avoided if all relevant Security Council resolutions had been implemented. The conflict again had an unacceptably high price and caused a lot of suffering and destruction on both sides. We believe that resolution 1701 (2006), which we co-sponsored, provides an important basis for starting the process towards a comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Lebanese crisis. We consider that resolution to be the first step in fully and urgently addressing all causes that have led to the crisis. In order for the entire process to be successful, full implementation of that resolution is needed. All concerned and relevant parties must fully respect and comply with it.

We call on all relevant parties in Lebanon to secure the release of the kidnapped Israeli soldiers. We also agree that it is necessary to address the problem of Lebanese prisoners. Those two issues, however, must not be linked, and the release of the Israeli soldiers must be immediate and unconditional.

The Lebanese Government has to regain full authority and control over its whole territory in order to prevent and stop any activities of domestic and

foreign militias. Those militias must be disarmed and disbanded expeditiously to ensure that there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese State.

Effective measures must be undertaken on the borders of Lebanon in order to prevent the flow of illegal weapons. The arms embargo must be fully observed by all relevant parties. The cooperation of the Government of Syria in that regard is also indispensable and is requested. We also hope the issue of the delineation of the border between Syria and Lebanon, including the Sheba'a farms, will be solved soon.

I take this opportunity to reaffirm our support for a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on all relevant Security Council resolutions, negotiations between the two sides and the agreements reached. We are convinced that the Quartet still represents the most appropriate mechanism for advancing the peace process and that the road map, in a possibly updated form reflecting the recent developments on the ground, represents the most efficient plan for achieving a lasting peace settlement to the conflict.

We welcome the ongoing efforts of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to form a Government of national unity. We hope and expect that such a Government will be committed to the Quartet principles and that its political platform will facilitate an early engagement, as well as the continuation of dialogue aimed at a solution to the Middle East conflict. We also hope, and reiterate our call, for an immediate end to violence by Palestinian factions and the release of the abducted Israeli soldier.

We remain deeply concerned about the economic and humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza. In this regard, we welcome the continuation and expansion of the temporary international mechanism, which will enable the channelling of resources and the delivery of assistance directly to the Palestinian people, and thereby address their urgent humanitarian and financial needs. To this end, we urge Israel to resume transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues, and encourage it to carry out this transfer via the temporary international mechanism. We also call for the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access and for the reopening of the Rafah and all other border crossings, which must remain open.

At the same time, we expect the Israeli Government to continue its commitment to peace in the Middle East, based on principles laid out in the road map, and to refrain from such steps and activities as might be contradictory to the principles of international law. In this context, we repeat our call for the immediate release of Palestinian ministers and legislators in Israeli custody and for a freeze on all settlement activities.

In conclusion, I reiterate our belief that there indeed exists a window of opportunity to reinvigorate the peace process. That opportunity should be seized by all concerned parties through concrete and immediate action. In this regard, we welcome the prospect of a meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the near future with a view to relaunching mutual negotiations. We encourage such continuous engagements among all parties to the conflict.

**The President**: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jorge Taiana, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International of Trade and Worship of Argentina.

**Mr. Taiana** (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like at the outset to express my delegation's appreciation for the excellent work done by the delegation of the Hellenic Republic in exercising the presidency of the Security Council during the month of September. I would like to thank you in particular, Madam, for all your efforts in organizing this meeting.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his statement. I also convey to him my country's appreciation for all his efforts during his tenure aimed at achieving a solution to the conflict in the Middle East.

Argentina believes that the Arab League's initiative to convene this ministerial meeting on the Middle East peace process is very timely. It provides a good opportunity for the Security Council to reflect on the status of the peace process and to begin to consider concrete measures to revitalize it.

The Arab-Israeli conflict has a historical and political importance that transcends the Middle East; it has been a cause of instability in that region for more than half a century. Argentina therefore believes that

the Security Council should attach high priority to the quest for a lasting resolution of the conflict.

The principles of the peace process were set out almost four decades ago by this body, and we do not believe that they should be revised. The occupation that began in 1967 must be ended through a negotiated solution between the parties. The result should be the emergence of an independent, democratic, viable and territorially contiguous Palestinian State, living in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

Experience shows there is no military solution to the conflict. The path of violence and mutual rejection will lead only to further suffering for the peoples of the Middle East. If that path is taken, the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to their dignity and to the establishment of an independent State, and the legitimate aspirations of the Israeli people to their security, will be frustrated indefinitely and submerged in a cycle of violence, reprisals and revenge.

The situation in Gaza and the West Bank demonstrates that neither will a policy based on unilateral acts resolve the conflict, and that faits accomplis on the ground, such as the construction of the separation barrier and settlement activities, will only exacerbate resentment, increase distrust and strengthen extremist elements.

Argentina is convinced that there is only one path for the peoples of the Middle East: mutual recognition as a necessary step towards a definitive peace. It is evident that the parties have not, on their own, been able to break the stalemate. The active assistance of the international community is therefore essential if that objective is to be achieved.

The Quartet has an important role to play in this regard. My country reaffirms its support for the Quartet's efforts to guide the peace process, and acknowledges the statement issued yesterday by the Quartet. However, we believe that, given the delays and difficulties experienced in implementing the road map, the Quartet must seriously reflect on the consequences of maintaining the status quo and should consider urgent additional measures to achieve concrete results.

The international community in general should also play a more proactive role in the search for peace. My country believes that the proposal to convene another international conference for the Middle East could contribute in a positive manner to the relaunching of the peace process, and we hope that all interested parties can work in a constructive manner with a view to convening such a conference as soon as possible. In this regard, we believe that it would be a positive step if the Secretary-General were to present a report to the Security Council before the end of his mandate setting out concrete proposals for overcoming the current stalled process.

The efforts of President Abbas to form a Palestinian Government of national unity also deserve our full support. We hope that such efforts will bear fruit and that the platform of the new Palestinian Government will be compatible with the three principles appropriately endorsed by the Security Council: recognition of Israel, renunciation of violence and acceptance of prior agreements.

We believe that there is an urgent need for international assistance to be re-established for the alleviation of the grave humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people. Israel must also transfer all Palestinian tax and customs revenues so as to avert the collapse of the Palestinian Authority.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm that our vision of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East is a comprehensive one. The bases for such a regional peace are the resolutions of this Council, in particular 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1701 (2006), the principle of land for peace, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We in Argentina, which is home to sizeable, active and flourishing Arab and Jewish communities, know that peace is possible.

**The President**: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

**Mr. Lavrov** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We have carefully considered the initiative of the League of Arab States to ask the Security Council to take a comprehensive look at the situation developing in the Middle East. Given the fact that the peace process in the region has suffered tangible damage, we believe that collective efforts to restore the political dialogue between the Arab parties and Israel would be timely and useful.

The war in Lebanon demonstrated once again that force not only fails to resolve problems, but also delays progress in moving towards just and lasting peace in the world. We need new and substantial momentum towards the resumption of the peace process on all tracks, within the framework of attaining a comprehensive settlement. The release of Palestinian prisoners and of the kidnapped Israeli soldier would create the conditions necessary to help resolve the humanitarian crisis.

Despite the complexities of the situation, we do not consider it hopeless. We continue to believe that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict holds the key to the fate of the region. It is obvious that as long as the conflict remains unresolved, the region will serve as a breeding ground for extremism, producing an ever growing number of hot spots, and not only in the Middle East.

Opportunities exist for finding political solutions to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We need to take advantage of those opportunities, in particular because the basic programme of action is well known: the road map endorsed by both parties to the conflict. We believe that a leading role must be played by the Quartet of international mediators. At yesterday's ministerial meeting of the Quartet, we took a decision to reinvigorate the work of the Quartet's special envoys and ministers with Israel, the Palestinians and leading Arab countries.

We also welcome Kofi Annan's initiative to return James Wolfensohn to his Middle East team. We believe that Mr. Wolfensohn's considerable experience will help in resolving the Palestinians' social and economic problems. We are convinced of the need to continue to provide robust support to the Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Abbas — whose presence in this Chamber we welcome — in his efforts to establish a government of national unity on a platform reflecting movement towards the Quartet principles. At the same time, it is important that the Palestinians clearly understand the link between their steps to accommodate Israel and progress towards a settlement.

We hope that the international community will support the head of the Palestinian Authority as the leader of the Palestinians, including by providing economic assistance to the Palestinians and releasing sources of financing. Given the extremely complex humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories, that is very important.

With regard to the Lebanese track, things are generally headed in the right direction, although the situation remains fragile. The implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) continues and must be completed. That clearly means that, among other things, all Lebanese political forces must be involved, including Hizbollah. We consider Israel's lifting of the air and sea blockade of Lebanon to be an important step. In addition, we welcome the deployment of units of the regular Lebanese army to southern Lebanon and the continued deployment of a strengthened United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. It is essential that the withdrawal of the Israeli army be completed in the coming days, as scheduled.

We are all concerned by the humanitarian situation in Lebanon. Russia will provide Lebanon with assistance in the form of engineering and sapper units of the Russian army to restore the infrastructure. Preparations are well under way for their deployment, which will occur at the end of the month.

The Syrian track, long dormant, must also be brought back to life. From our contacts with the leadership of the Syrian Arab Republic, we have the impression that Damascus is interested in establishing a lasting peace in the region.

Finally, I should like to emphasize once again that we have a favourable view of the League of Arab States initiative to begin preparations for the convening of an international conference on the Middle East. Russia has always supported that idea, as President Putin noted during his visit to the region in 2005. We understand that it will not be easy to implement this initiative, but we must make progress as soon as possible in our collective efforts to resolve of one of the most complex problems of our day. The conference must be carefully prepared for; it must not be reduced to just a one-day event consisting only of speech-making. The conference is essential as a starting point for the process of negotiating a Middle East settlement on all interrelated tracks.

We must not forget that it was the Security Council that originally adopted the resolutions that form the basis of the process aimed at a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East. Our first obligation is to help begin the practical work to achieve that objective.

**The President**: I now call on Her Excellency Mrs. Asha-Rose Migeqi Migiro, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Republic of Tanzania.

**Mrs. Migiro** (United Republic of Tanzania): Tanzania welcomes this timely debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, at the initiative of the Arab League.

We note with sadness the prevailing gloom and suffering that continue to afflict the Middle East region, and the Palestinian people in particular. The current relationship between the State of Israel and its neighbours is increasingly characterized by an erosion of trust. We see that as a serious threat to the huge investment already made in promoting peace and security in the region. Tanzania believes that agreements reached by the parties after painstaking effort must not be allowed to unravel.

We are aware that the Palestinian question is at the core of the crisis in the Middle East. Therefore, the challenge before the Security Council, the United Nations as a whole and the international community is to steer the parties towards the full realization of both the aspirations of the people of Palestine to peace, independence and statehood, and those of the people of Israel to security. It is in this regard that Tanzania continues to support the two-State solution, as provided for in the road map, as a practical strategy in accordance with United Nations resolutions aimed at achieving a just solution to the conflict in the Middle East.

We regret that the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is deteriorating rapidly because of continuous — and at times excessive — military operations in Gaza and parts of the West Bank, which have caused death and suffering to civilians. In our view, that state of affairs is not conducive to peace and stability. In addition, the withholding of financial resources from the Hamas-led Government has crippled its functions and has caused hardship to employees and their dependents. That is collective punishment of the Palestinian people and does not contribute to an atmosphere of trust and mutual confidence.

Yesterday, in his address to the General Assembly, President Jakaya Kikwete of the United Republic of Tanzania encouraged the Quartet to revive the peace process laid down in the road map. He reiterated our belief that a just, viable, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can be realized only through a negotiated settlement. We therefore call for respect for all commitments mutually agreed upon. Moreover, we call for an end to all actions that would escalate and aggravate the precarious situation that exists.

For its part, Israel should strive to live on the basis of its democratic and humane origins. It should respect international law and put to an end all practices seen as amounting to the violation of human rights. Israel's restrictions on the freedoms of the Palestinian population, its settlement activities and the building of the separation wall must be stopped, since they do not help the implementation of the obligations under the road map.

It is important to underscore the significance of open communication in a negotiated solution to the conflict. In that regard, we commend President Mahmoud Abbas for his genuine effort to lead the people of Palestine into constructive engagement with Israel for the purpose of reviving the peace process, as well as for his endeavour to form a government of national unity. It is in the interests of the region and of the international community to provide him with the needed support and assistance.

**The President**: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State of the United States of America.

**Ms. Rice** (United States of America): First, I should like to thank the presidency of the Security Council for arranging this very important meeting on the initiative of the Arab League. Thank you very much for being here, Minister. I should also like to welcome the presence of President Abbas in this Chamber. I believe that this is a very important discussion, and the United States is very pleased to participate.

On Tuesday, in the General Assembly, President Bush affirmed the United States commitment to the vision of two States — Israel and a viable, independent Palestine — living side by side in peace and security. The President believes strongly that both Israelis and Palestinians deserve to live in dignity and with the ability to pursue their aspirations. To this end, the President directed me to work with moderate regional leaders to help Palestinians reform their security services and to support leaders from both sides as they work together to resolve their differences.

President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert are committed to peace. I look forward to working with them, with our Quartet partners and with our regional friends to bring about the conditions that will allow us to accelerate progress on the road map.

This progress depends on many obligations that both sides must fulfil. It depends, of course, on a true Palestinian partner committed to peace. The United States has unequivocally declared our intention to support the re-emergence of such a partner, and, together with other members of the Quartet, we have called upon the Palestinian Authority to commit to the three principles of the Quartet: renouncing terror and violence, recognizing the right of Israel to exist and accepting previous agreements and obligations, including the road map. We welcome President Abbas's efforts to achieve a unity government that reflects the Quartet principles and that can facilitate engagement on a range of political, security and economic concerns.

We also welcome the meeting in New York, on Monday, of Israeli Foreign Minister Livni and President Abbas, and we are encouraged by statements by Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas indicating a willingness to resume direct talks. We continue to urge all parties to foster a positive and hopeful atmosphere in which those talks might take place. And to this end we call again for the unconditional release of Israel Defense Forces Corporal Shalit. We also call for the immediate and unconditional release of the other two Israeli soldiers, who are being held by Hizbollah: Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev.

The United States is, of course, mindful of the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people, and we have substantially increased our direct assistance to the Palestinians to $468 million, in a package that includes $275 million in humanitarian aid. Yesterday, we and other members of the Quartet agreed to extend and expand the temporary international mechanism to ensure that Palestinian citizens can receive necessary assistance. We have called for an increase in donor support, and we have asked both parties to fully implement their responsibilities under the Agreement on Movement and Access, so that economic life can be reborn in the Palestinian territory.

The Quartet has declared the urgent need to make progress. I ask the members of the Council to support the Quartet's efforts as we seek to help Israelis and Palestinians achieve the conditions necessary to move forward and to build the foundation for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The United States, I want to assure the Council, is fully committed to this goal and to working actively and urgently to achieve it.

In closing, let me just note that the last time we were in this Chamber it was to adopt resolution 1701 (2006), which brought an end to the fighting in Lebanon. That resolution is being implemented, but there is much work to do. I look forward to the continued engagement of this body to ensure the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) so that the people of Lebanon might also live in peace and so that the Government of Lebanon might fully extend its authority throughout its territory.

**The President**: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Rodolphe Adada, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Congo.

**Mr. Adada** (Congo) (*spoke in French*): Madam President, my delegation welcomes your positive and commendable initiative to convene this public meeting, upon the request of the League of Arab States. In view of the recent grave developments in the Middle East situation, this is no routine meeting. To the contrary, following the sudden outbreak of violence in the region, the Arab League initiative to call for a ministerial meeting of the Security Council has emerged as an opening to help revitalize the comprehensive peace process, which is currently at an impasse.

The grave events that occurred in Gaza and Lebanon following the abduction of Israeli soldiers highlight the extreme volatility of the situation in that vital region and the risk of a widespread eruption if talks aimed at a comprehensive negotiated settlement continue to languish.

Let us not forget that this is a human tragedy that has endured for six decades. Unfortunately, in the face of the heavy losses and destruction on both sides caused by the new cycle of violence, the Security Council — the United Nations organ with primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security — did not respond quickly enough to shoulder its responsibilities. We regretted this vacillation, which was misinterpreted by the victims of the excesses and by international public opinion.

Resolution 1701 (2006) has made it possible to open up new prospects in the Israel-Lebanon crisis. We need to foster such developments and support all efforts to build a peace that must not remain fragile. We need to take advantage of this respite to seek viable, lasting solutions to all the problems involved, such as Lebanon's national unity and sovereignty and its relations with its neighbours, and Israel's security.

In that regard, a strengthened United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon now has a particularly crucial role to play. We commend the countries that quickly answered the call for a speedy mobilization of forces to confront this dangerous situation. France and Italy merit our appreciation. We encourage other countries to participate in this operation, which could be of enormous help in creating new conditions for peace. We also welcome the generosity of major donors in rebuilding Lebanon.

But such developments, however positive they may be, must not cloak the sad reality of the tragic situation the Palestinian people face daily. We encourage Hamas to shoulder its responsibilities as a governing authority by accepting the validity of previous commitments in the context of a settlement of the Middle East crisis. At the same time, we call upon the international community to continue humanitarian assistance to a population that, owing to the circumstances, is reduced to depending largely on the outside world for daily survival. We also encourage all Palestinian political forces to seek unity and to put an end to all provocations, which have negative consequences and which, moreover, do not resolve the problem of the liberation of the occupied territories.

Our concern here is to help relaunch the peace process without creating a new framework for negotiations or new rules. The rules exist and are well known. First of all, there are all the relevant Security Council resolutions, which all — I stress "all" — the parties must implement. For too long, the Council has been accused of bias for continuing to close its eyes to violations by one of the parties to the conflict and to that party's failure to comply with the Council's resolutions. Secondly, we have the Arab peace initiative, based on the principle of land for peace; we believe that this represents a good basis for a negotiated settlement. Thirdly, we have the Quartet road map, which is based on recognition of the existence of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

If today's debate can help the key players — the parties themselves and the sponsors of the peace process — to return to the negotiating table and implement the principles of the road map, that would be an invaluable contribution by the Security Council, which cannot stand aloof from a situation that affects international peace and security — the Council's main raison d'être. The Security Council must make it clear to the parties that there can be no solution to the Middle East crisis based on the use of force. The only useful approach is that of a political and diplomatic settlement, and it must be resumed immediately.

**The President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Tatsuo Arima, Special Envoy of the Government of Japan.

**Mr. Arima** (Japan): Japan welcomes the timely convening of this Security Council meeting, at the initiative of the League of Arab States, to discuss the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is timely because the recent hostilities in Lebanon have made us recognize anew the need for a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict. It is therefore our hope that this meeting will pave the way to an early resumption of direct talks between the parties concerned for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. Japan believes that the United Nations needs to play a more active role in facilitating and supporting the peace efforts of the parties involved, as the peace there will be a global blessing as well.

As we continue our concerted efforts to restore peace in Lebanon, we must remain deeply aware of the dire deterioration of the human condition in the Palestinian territories, which the recent crisis in Lebanon has overshadowed. The only cure for this region's predicament will be a peace achieved by the political will and efforts of the leaders of the parties. Japan remains deeply committed to encourage and assist such political will and efforts, in close cooperation with the international community as represented here at this Council meeting.

As regards the situation in Lebanon, Japan shares the view that to rebuild stability in Lebanon, the full and steady implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) is essential. It is imperative that the international community support the efforts by the parties to secure disarmament of militias in Lebanon and delineation of the country's international borders

in order to ensure a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution.

Japan intends to lend its maximum support to Lebanon as part of its overall efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East, recognizing that the stability of southern Lebanon is one of the keys to comprehensive peace and stability in that region. In this connection, Japan calls on Syria, another party to the Middle East peace, which has a crucial role in achieving the goal, to join proactively in the international efforts.

The present impasse in the Palestinian question must be dealt with with the utmost urgency. Japan welcomes and supports the determined efforts of President Abbas to break the impasse by establishing a national unity Government of the Palestinian Authority. It is Japan's strong expectation that the new Palestinian Government will make it clear that it will pursue coexistence and co-prosperity with Israel through dialogue. The international community, for its part, should seize such a moment as an opportunity to move the peace process forward. Japan strongly expects also that Israel will positively respond to this opportunity and make its best efforts to resume such a dialogue. Japan welcomes the recent statements by the two leaders expressing their readiness to hold a summit meeting and hopes that it will lead to a long-awaited resumption of peace talks between the two parties.

Along with the political impasse, we should also address the worsening security and humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people. All our efforts are doomed to fail if we cannot bring about a sense of improvement in their daily lives and a hope for their future. With this in mind, Prime Minister Koizumi, during his visit to the Middle East last July, promised humanitarian assistance totalling $25 million, thereby fully disbursing the $160 million that the Prime Minister pledged to President Abbas in May last year, when he visited us, to alleviate the predicament of the Palestinian people.

In addition, Prime Minister Koizumi, believing that it was of vital importance to generate hope for all the people in the region, proposed a programme called the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity. That initiative, aimed at promoting the development of the Jordan Valley through regional cooperation, was enthusiastically welcomed and endorsed by the leaders of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan. Preparations are now underway to form a consultative body of the four parties to materialize this concept. It is Japan's belief that, while the international community needs to address the immediate needs of the Palestinians to ease their lives, it is equally important to pave the way for future coexistence and co-prosperity by bringing the parties together to work jointly for common purposes on a longer perspective.

Japan is determined to continue to cooperate with all the parties both in the region and outside it to put an end to this longest conflict, which has lasted virtually since the end of World War II, causing so much death and misery to so many people. I here thank the Arab League, the United Nations and all others who have made the holding of this meeting possible to help revitalize the Middle East peace process.

**The President**: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

Allow me to start by expressing my appreciation to all of you, and to His Excellency the Secretary-General, for participating in today's extraordinary ministerial meeting of the Security Council to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and to thank you for the kind words addressed to me.

Greece fully subscribes to the statement that is to be delivered later by the Foreign Minister of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

It is a privilege for me to be presiding over this extraordinary Council meeting, and I would like to thank you all for having supported the efforts of the presidency in making today's meeting a reality. This is a great honour and, at the same time, a very humbling experience.

All of us in this room are well aware of the multifaceted challenges that we face in the Middle East. Such is the nature of those challenges that they affect not only the peoples of the region — not only the Israelis, the Palestinians, the Lebanese, the Syrians, the Jordanians, the Egyptians and others — but the entire international community. All of our global partners, whether they be the European Union, the Arab League or the Non-Aligned Movement, to name but a few, consistently place the question of the Middle East very high on their agendas.

Despite the variances that we observe in the statements and positions formulated in these forums, there is one crucial element that is common to all: one

that has been uttered by all here in this Chamber, and that is the need to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. This is our common goal, and this, I believe, constitutes the collective will of all the peoples of the world, as expressed by their representatives repeatedly during the opening of each session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

I cannot think of any other conflict that has held the unwavering attention of so many for so long. And yet, as years turn into decades, generations grow up knowing nothing but hatred. Reason and understanding give place to fundamentalism and extremism. Despite the collective desire to see peace prevail, generations of Israelis and Arabs have been denied the right to live in freedom and security.

That is why my role here today is indeed humbling. I am humbled by the suffering endured by so many for so long, by the tears of mothers who have lost sons and daughters to this conflict, and by the courageous vision and commitment of those who, throughout the history of this troubled region, have genuinely sought to bring about peace and have paid the ultimate price in the name of this cause.

To honour the innocent victims, and as an obligation to the children yet unborn, we must ensure that we will spare no effort, that we will leave no option unexplored and that we will exhaust all possibilities in pursuing and, ultimately, in achieving this elusive peace. We all have our part to play, no matter how small or how large, and we share a collective responsibility to assist the peoples of the Middle East to realize their aspirations to live in dignity and in peace and to view their future with hope and optimism.

As a citizen of Athens and guided by the spirit of this city's ancient forefathers, I cannot but maintain my firm belief in the prevalence of reason: reason, tolerance, acceptance and even — to use a Greek word — symbiosis, over force.

And what does all this tell us? It tells us that peace cannot be served by refusing to recognize the existence of one's neighbour, nor can it be served by perpetuating a climate of fear and insecurity through a combination of suicide and missile attacks, and nor can peace be advanced by such practices as the abduction of Corporal Gilad Shalit. Equally, it tells us that peace cannot be achieved by denying an entire nation its rightful place where it can live in dignity and freedom, nor can it be achieved by imposing such restrictions, which are both humiliating and disparaging, constituting an acute obstacle to any prospect of normalcy in one's daily life; and nor, indeed, can peace be achieved by forcefully confiscating lands and by erecting barriers.

Any settlement of the Middle East conflict needs to conform to international law, including the resolutions adopted by this Council. It has to be the product of negotiations, the outcome of which should not be prejudged by unilateral measures on the ground. The principles that should form the basis for a comprehensive and lasting peace in the region are well known to all of us. They include all relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, including the principle of land for peace, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We expect the Quartet to continue its active engagement in order to fulfil its specific role. We welcome its recent decision to meet on a regular basis, including with the parties and other regional partners, to monitor developments and actions taken by the parties and to discuss the way ahead. And we look forward to concrete results arising out of this. We support President Abbas's efforts to form a Government of national unity that we hope will adhere to the principles of the Quartet and promote the cause of peace. And we should also realize that causes cannot be promoted or achieved through violence and terror and, at the same time, that security cannot be guaranteed by military means alone.

I appeal to all sides to let reason and understanding prevail. Let them prevail so that the seeds of peace that have already been sown by the international community may be given a chance to take root and flourish on the fertile and historic lands of the Middle East to the benefit of all the peoples of this region and of the world as a whole.

I now resume my functions as President.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Erkki Tuomioja, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland.

**Mr. Tuomioja** (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The following countries also align themselves with this statement: Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, the former Yugoslav

Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

The dramatic developments that we witnessed during the past few months have again demonstrated the urgent need to move from violence and hatred to peace and confidence. I would like to thank the Arab League for its initiative in convening this session, as the European Union also sees that the most pressing issue is to end the current stalemate in the peace process. There are no military or unilateral solutions to any of the challenges and problems of the Middle East. Lasting peace and security in the region can only be ensured by a comprehensive settlement with, at its core, a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The urgent need to change developments in the region is dictated first and foremost by the fact that the situation on the ground is deteriorating and we must urgently take measures to alleviate the situation of the Palestinian people. The economic and humanitarian situation is severe in the Palestinian territories: 70 per cent of the population live under the poverty line, most of them children deprived of their basic needs.

The European Union has mobilized more resources than ever before to meet the urgent needs of the Palestinian people, including through the temporary international mechanism for assistance to the Palestinian people. This mechanism has allowed substantial resources to be channelled directly to the Palestinian people during the past few months, and it has now been extended. We encourage donors and others in the region to make full use of this mechanism. The European Union repeats its call on Israel to resume transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues. These resources are needed in order to improve the severe situation of the Palestinians.

The humanitarian situation is directly connected to the question of access and movement. That is a major problem in the Palestinian territories in general and in Gaza in particular. The European Union has stressed in its contacts with Israeli counterparts that the border crossings such as Rafah and Karni be opened and remain open. We urge the parties urgently to take concrete steps to implement their obligations under the Agreement on Movement and Access, and, in that regard, the European Union reiterates its continued commitment to the European Union Border Assistance Mission in Rafah.

The viability of an agreed two-State solution is threatened by the continued enlargement of settlements and the continued building of the separation barrier on Palestinian land. The European Union will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders other than those agreed by both parties.

The European Union demands that Palestinian militants cease all violence directed towards Israel or other Palestinians. The Israeli soldier must be released immediately and unconditionally. The detained Palestinian ministers and legislators must also be released. The European Union also urges Israel to abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law, including its obligation to protect civilians and not to use disproportionate measures. Security is not an exclusive matter for one party — it matters for everyone in the whole region.

The European Union stresses the need to solve underlying problems by political means. Therefore, we welcome the announcement by the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, on an agreement to form a Government of national unity. The European Union has expressed its hope that those negotiations will be rapidly and successfully concluded and that the new Government's political platform will reflect the Quartet's principles and allow for early engagement.

There is also a need to proceed on a diplomatic path regionally. That is why we need support for the peace process from all regional partners. The ultimate goal is to reach a comprehensive and sustainable peace in the Middle East. It is imperative to create a new dynamic towards that goal.

The European Union welcomes the statement of the Quartet issued yesterday, which reaffirms the commitment of the Quartet to the road map. The road map has as its aim the creation of two States living side by side in peace and security. In order to achieve that, all parties must respect their obligations under the road map. The European Union gives its full support to the Quartet's intention to meet on a regular basis in the coming period, as well as to engage actively with the parties and other regional partners to monitor developments and to discuss the way ahead.

**The President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Executive Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.

**Mr. Abbas** (Palestinian Authority) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am delighted to attend this meeting of the highest body in the international community, which holds the fate of the world in its hands, and I am sure that it is in the safest possible hands. On this occasion, allow me to sincerely thank you for agreeing to convene this meeting to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. If this meeting shows anything, it shows that the world wants to reach a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict as quickly as possible, in order to eradicate a source of tension that affects all aspects of life, not just in the Middle East, but also in the rest of the world.

Naturally, this meeting was convened in response to an initiative by the League of Arab States and its Secretary-General, my brother Amr Moussa. I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to all those who have spoken so far. I have been made keenly aware that the representatives present here want to reach a just, comprehensive and permanent settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, and I really hope that their sincere, lofty words will be followed by concrete deeds leading to the achievement of a settlement, namely, the establishment of a Palestinian State living side by side with the State of Israel.

As my brothers in the Arab world had agreed, the Foreign Minister of Bahrain took the floor to speak on our behalf and expressed our common position. He stated what we deep down wish to see.

I have nothing to add to what he said in that regard. I would just add that we are fully committed to peace through negotiations. We are committed to international legitimacy, to the road map of the Quartet and to living with our neighbours in peace and security.

I will stop here, Madam President, as I have a rather lengthy statement to deliver in the General Assembly in one hour. Thank you all very much.

**The President**: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the items on its agenda.

*The meeting rose at 1.55 p.m.*